

to pay higher prices for drugs made in America than people in other countries do, and I think they owe it to the seniors to get off this high horse and stop trying to beat this attempt to extend medical coverage to seniors for prescription drugs.

People that live on fixed incomes ought to be able to get the benefit of discounts you get when you buy in bulk. This is not Government regulation; this is market power. A lot of these drugs they have long since recovered the research and developments cost—long since. And I just think it's wrong for our people either not to be able to get them at all or to pay so much more than others do. And this is one way to sort of split the difference between their position that they need higher profits to invest in research and development and the very low cost that they can get if they happen to live close enough to the Canadian border to cross it.

So I would like to see Medicare cover prescription drugs on a voluntary basis so our seniors can get discount prices. It's very important—

Legislative Action

Mr. Roberts. The ideas that have been floated in the Senate, which ostensibly are voucher systems, would you agree with that type of system to pay for prescription drugs?

The President. Well, it wouldn't be as effective as the proposal we've made because it would be more difficult to get the benefit of discounts. And therefore, over a few years it would be harder to keep the premiums down. But as I said, I would like to see the Members of Congress in both parties engage with us on this. Let's work it through. Let's come up with something. You've got three-quarters of our seniors in trouble out there, and we ought to do something about it.

Mr. Roberts. In terms of national priorities, how important is this?

The President. Oh, I think it's very important. The big challenges facing our country right now, at the top of those challenges are what to do about the aging of America as more of us live longer—that means we have to save Social Security and reform and modernize Medicare; and the children of America—we have to give all of our kids a world-

class education with the most diverse student population ever.

Those are the big challenges we face. And to me this is a big part of it. You're going to have—the average 65-year-old person today has a life expectancy of 82. The people being born today, if the human genome project works out right, might have a life expectancy of 100. But if that's true, in order to maintain their quality of life and their health and not bankrupt the hospitals, we'll have to keep more and more of them well with the proper kind of drug treatment programs.

So you want the drug companies to be able to continue to pioneer new drugs, but they've got to be affordable, and they have to be accessible.

Mr. Roberts. Thank you for your time, sir, I appreciate it.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview began at approximately 3:40 p.m. at the Sheraton New York Hotel and Tower. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks on House Action on Patients' Bill of Rights Legislation and an Exchange With Reporters in New York City

October 7, 1999

The President. This afternoon the House of Representatives took an important and encouraging step in the effort to give the American people a real Patients' Bill of Rights. After rejecting watered-down legislation by substantial votes, the House voted by a large margin to approve a strong bipartisan Patients' Bill of Rights, sponsored by Congressmen Norwood and Dingell.

The passage of this bill represents a major victory for every family and every health plan. It says you have the right to the nearest emergency room care and the right to see a specialist. It says you have the right to know you can't be forced to switch doctors in the middle of a cancer treatment or a period of pregnancy. And it says you have the right to hold your health care plan accountable if it causes you or a loved one grave harm.

It shows that America is no longer willing to allow unfeeling practices of some health plans to add to the pain of injury or disease. It proves that America is committed to putting patients first.

But let me be clear: We still have a lot of work to do before this bill becomes the law of the land. When the House and the Senate negotiators meet, we must be sure the bill is paid for, and when they meet in conference, the Republican leaders must resist the urge to weaken the patient protections guaranteed in the Norwood-Dingell bill, and they must not undo behind closed doors what has been done in the public. They must also resist the urge to load up the final legislation with poison pill provisions that they know I can't sign.

But today, let's just congratulate the Members of both parties in the House of Representatives for making a responsible choice in the face of significant pressure to do otherwise.

I especially thank Congressman Norwood and Congressman Dingell for their leadership and for their dogged determination. We have shown once again that, when we work together across party lines, we can use this moment of prosperity to meet the greatest needs of the American people.

Thank you very much.

Q. Sir, what do you think made the difference? Yesterday you were almost conceding defeat.

The President. I think a lot of work was done by a lot of people, but I think in the end, most people just went up there and voted for what they thought was right. Now, you know, there's kind of an unusual parliamentary maneuver of which you're all aware in which they've tied another bill to it and sent them both to conference. The other bill is one I don't support. It would cost an awful lot of money and help less than one percent of the uninsured in America, most of whom can afford their own health care policies anyway. And so we have to watch things like that being done in the final legislation. But a big majority of the House did vote for this bill, just as it was written, and I'm very proud of them.

This is the sort of thing America wants us to do. We can work together across party

lines; we can get things done. There will still be plenty for the two parties to argue about in good conscience in the coming election. No matter what we do—we can deal with every challenge before the Congress now, and there will still be things to debate next November.

So I would hope that this is an omen of more good things to come. And I'm certainly prepared to do my part, and I'm very grateful today. I talked to some Republican and Democratic House Members before the vote and encouraged them. And I'm very proud of all of them. And I thank them.

Meeting With Teamsters President

Q. Could you tell us about your talks with Hoffa?

The President. Excuse me?

Q. Could you tell us about your talks with Jimmy Hoffa—

The President. Oh, sure—

Q. —and did you ask him to not stand in the way of an early endorsement of the AFL-CIO for Gore?

The President. Actually, we didn't talk much about that. We talked about—this is the first long personal visit we've had, although we've worked on a lot of things. He thanked me for the work that I'd done over the last 6½ years. We talked a little about that.

We talked about—interestingly enough, we talked about Franklin Roosevelt and Frances Perkins and the rise of the American labor movement for some good amount of time; said he was glad I was coming tonight, and that President Roosevelt was the last President to talk to the Teamsters.

And we talked quite a bit about trade and about his strong feeling that we ought to make sure that the safety provisions of NAFTA are met. And I assured him that we were doing everything we could to do just that and that we would continue to do so.

He said he was deeply concerned that, ever since the recession in Mexico and then the recession in Asia, countries with whom we had had a balance of trade or a small surplus we now seem to be running large deficits with. He was concerned about the rise of protectionism in Europe. And we talked about that.

And that was—most of our conversation was about that. We also talked about golf for probably too long. We had a good talk about golf. We didn't talk too much about other politics, and I said I look forward to seeing him tonight.

Thank you.

Patients' Bill of Rights Legislation

Q. Mr. President, do you have any reason to believe the Senate will allow the right to sue?

The President. Sure, if they listen to the American people. That's what happened today. I mean, 70 percent of our citizens want it; 70 percent of Republicans want it. And there's a way to do it. If they just look at their own estimates—not mine, the Congressional Budget Office—says it will add, at the most, \$2 dollars a month a policy to have all the protections of the Patients' Bill of Rights. And that's a good investment in our future.

Thanks.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:35 p.m. at the Sheraton Towers. In his remarks, he referred to James P. Hoffa, general president, International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

Statement on the Proposed "Pension Reduction Disclosure Act of 1999"

October 7, 1999

I commend Senators Moynihan, Jeffords, Leahy, Robb, Kerrey, and Rockefeller and Representatives Matsui, Weller, Andrews, Gejdenson, Pomeroy, Bentsen, and Kelly for introducing the "Pension Reduction Disclosure Act of 1999." This important new legislation, developed in partnership with my administration, will secure the "right-to-know" for American workers when changes are being made to their private pension retirement benefits. I applaud the leadership of these Members of Congress in furthering or effort to protect the retirement security of American workers and look forward to working with them to achieve speedy enactment of this legislation.

Our voluntary, employment-based pension system plays a critical role in providing income security for American workers in re-

tirement. Increasingly, employers are converting traditional, employer-sponsored defined benefit plans to "cash balance" and other new types of pension plans. While these new types of pension plans may provide enhanced benefits for some workers, they also could result in other workers having smaller pensions at retirement than they would have if their old plan had continued.

Unfortunately, too few workers understand the effects of these conversions. Too many workers today are left in the dark about changes to their retirement plan. In fact, under some new plans, some workers may not even realize that they have temporarily stopped earnings any benefits at all. This is not right. It needs to be changed.

This legislation would ensure that all Americans have the necessary information to plan for retirement. It would provide workers with meaningful and timely notice of plan changes and clearly demonstrate the impact of those changes now and in the future. It would shine sunlight on changes in retirement benefits. And it would do this without unduly burdening employers. It is truly a smart, commonsense measure, and Congress should pass it.

The sponsoring Members and my administration worked closely together to develop this proposal. I am grateful to Labor Secretary Alexis Herman, Treasury Secretary Larry Summers, and National Economic Council Director Gene Sperling for their hard work to provide this important new protection for American workers.

Statement on Senate Action on Education Appropriations Legislation

October 7, 1999

Today the Senate passed a spending bill that woefully shortchanges America's children. The Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriation bill fails to make vital investments in our Nation's children. It undermines the commitment we made last year to hire quality teachers and reduce class size in the early grades. It underfunds after-school programs and such